

# Vancouver's Urban Design

A Decade of Achievements





### Eleven Projects Introduction



**T**his brochure highlights eleven projects completed in the past decade which have made significant contributions to the urban design of their respective precincts or neighbourhoods and enhanced the city's emerging form. The objective of this brochure is to increase awareness by highlighting these completed projects in the hopes of inspiring others, and fostering a better appreciation of the civic virtues and public values of good urban design. Their excellence is, in large part, the result of a true public/private partnership combining private developers' initiatives in response to their individual development programs, and their architects' skill and vision interacting with City staff on urban design policies and public objectives.

What is urban design? Simply put, it is the design of the city and all its visible components. That is, how buildings and the spaces between them - open spaces and parks, bridges and streets, sidewalks and walkways, bodies of water, trees and landscaping, lighting and signage, etc. - are all designed together over time to create an attractive, memorable, and safe city. All great cities show evidence of this significant, but seldom appreciated, interdisciplinary activity. To Vancouver's urban design is added the challenge of integrating the built environment with the city's spectacular natural setting.

Cities take a long time to develop and are the sum of the efforts of many people and agencies. With Vancouver's recent surge in development, its citizens are beginning to see a noticeable improvement in the city's urban form within a relatively short time. While the decade has seen the addition of many spectacular public parks, these spaces have been specifically excluded, in order to focus on private sector development contributions to the public realm.

The selected projects are intended to illustrate as wide a variety as possible of urban design strategies that respond to both City policy and good practice and benefit the public realm such as: view creation and protection; compatible building scale and massing; enhanced street character and activity; provision of public open space; improved public safety and security; enhanced residential livability; and improved pedestrian access and comfort.

Each project is briefly described and illustrated, including development statistics. There is then a discussion of how it contributes to good urban design. While the selected projects have each demonstrated some aspect of urban design excellence, it is recognized that many other worthy projects have not been included due to space limitations.



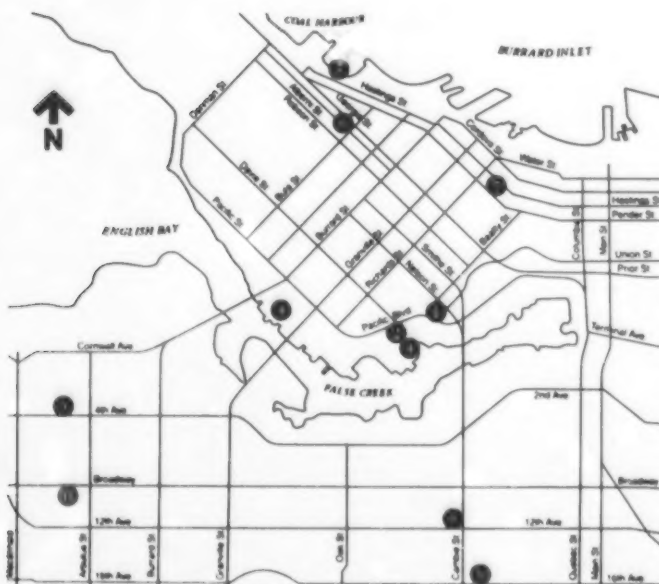
## Foreword

Since Expo '86, Vancouver has been carefully and methodically reshaping itself into a uniquely different and extraordinarily special kind of contemporary North American city. This is a story of inventive urban design; of new approaches for interdisciplinary cooperation in design; and of new techniques for delivery of amenities and to accommodate our disadvantaged through the integrated neighbourhoods we have dared to design. Our designers - both in the public and private sectors - have become powerful innovators of high quality, high density housing, comfortable and safe streetscapes, attractive public places and diverse, complete communities.

And the results are worth talking about - even worth celebrating. We offer these few memorable examples of our best recent buildings and spaces both as a challenge for further excellence among our own design professionals, politicians and citizens and as prototypes for other people in other places who are also enjoined in our struggle to discover the liveable, beautiful, vital, humane and sustainable city of the new century.

Larry Beasley  
Co-Director of Planning  
City of Vancouver

## List of Projects



- 1 'Waterworks/Beatty Mews' - 1005 Expo Boulevard
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- 3 888 Beach Avenue
- 4 'The Crestmark' - 1200 Marinaside Crescent
- 5 Coal Harbour Waterfront Walkway
- 6 'Residences on Georgia' - 1200 West Georgia Street
- 7 Central City Lodge - 415 West Pender Street
- 8 City Square - 555 West 12th Avenue
- 9 'Capers Block' - 2211 West 4th Avenue
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- 11 2315 West 10th Avenue (at Vine Street)

# Waterworks/Beatty Mews

1005 EXPO BOULEVARD

Developer/Owner: **Concord Pacific**  
 Architect: **Downs Archambault & Partners**  
 Landscape Architect: **Harold Neufeldt**  
 Public Artist: **Barbara Steinman**  
 City Staff: **Ralph Segal (Development Planner);  
 Pat Wotherspoon, Ian Smith (Area Planners)**  
 Year of completion: **1998**

## PROJECT DATA

Zoning: CD-1  
 Site area: 169,430 sq.ft.  
 FSR: 2.9  
 Use: residential  
 Floor area: 489,634 sq.ft.  
 Height: two towers: 300 ft. & 262 ft.



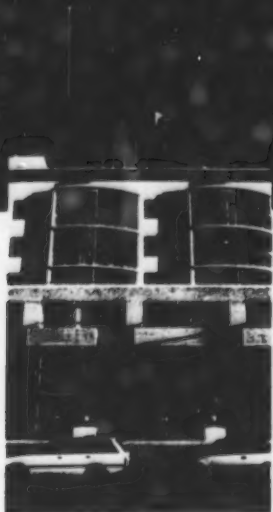
"Prow" of Landmark tower terminates Pacific Boulevard visual axis.

The Waterworks/Beatty Mews project, bounded by Pacific Boulevard, Cambie and Nelson Streets, occupies a strategic site straddling the former Beatty Street between the Expo lands and the existing downtown (refer to context plan). The site is influenced heavily by the surrounding street and bridge geometry, the water views to the south, and the former Beatty Street, now a public pedestrian mews. The site abuts the Nelson Street approach to Cambie Street Bridge. It also terminates the northerly visual axis down Pacific Boulevard. As such, the site presents some key urban design challenges that were identified in the area specific Quayside Neighbourhood Urban Design Guidelines.

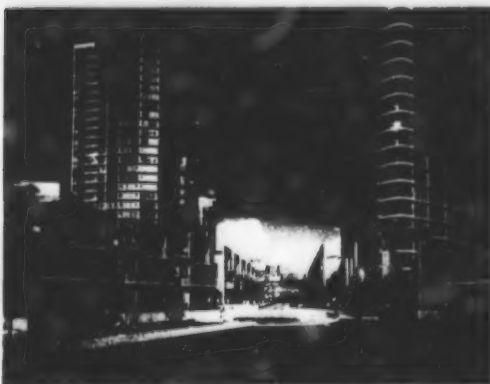
The project consists of two residential towers, one on each side of the pedestrianized Beatty Mews, with three-storey townhouses lining the mews and framing a public plaza adjacent to Pacific Boulevard. A seven-storey building containing street fronting townhouses lines Cambie Street, with a restaurant addressing the corner at Pacific Boulevard. The project is notable for its urban design solutions to a number of issues:

- the successful integration and framing of public open space into the project, both the Beatty Street Mews and the Pacific Boulevard plaza;
- the termination of the Pacific Boulevard visual axis by the careful siting and prow-like form of the 34-storey Landmark tower;
- the integration of public art into the project; and
- the high degree of residential livability achieved on this highly exposed site through several strategies such as:
  - careful placement of buffering buildings to create privacy and reduce noise from the bridge ramp and Pacific Boulevard;
  - the use of rooftop terraces and upper level private open spaces; and
  - screening and trellising.

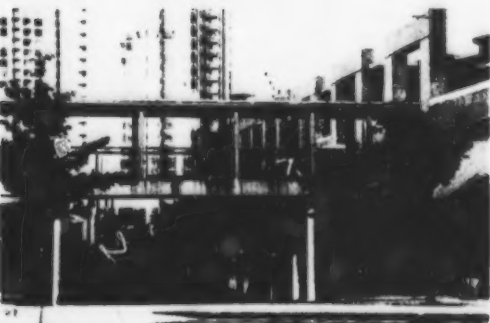
At the Nelson/Cambie corner a retail podium is positioned tight to the sidewalk to define this urban edge. Along the Nelson Street edge, from east of the Beatty Mews to where the bridge springs, the Landmark tower is set back about 50 ft. and screened from the bridge ramp by a landscaped buffer. The location of the terraced parkade structure along this edge with the glazed amenity facility on top further reduces the impacts of the bridge on the site.



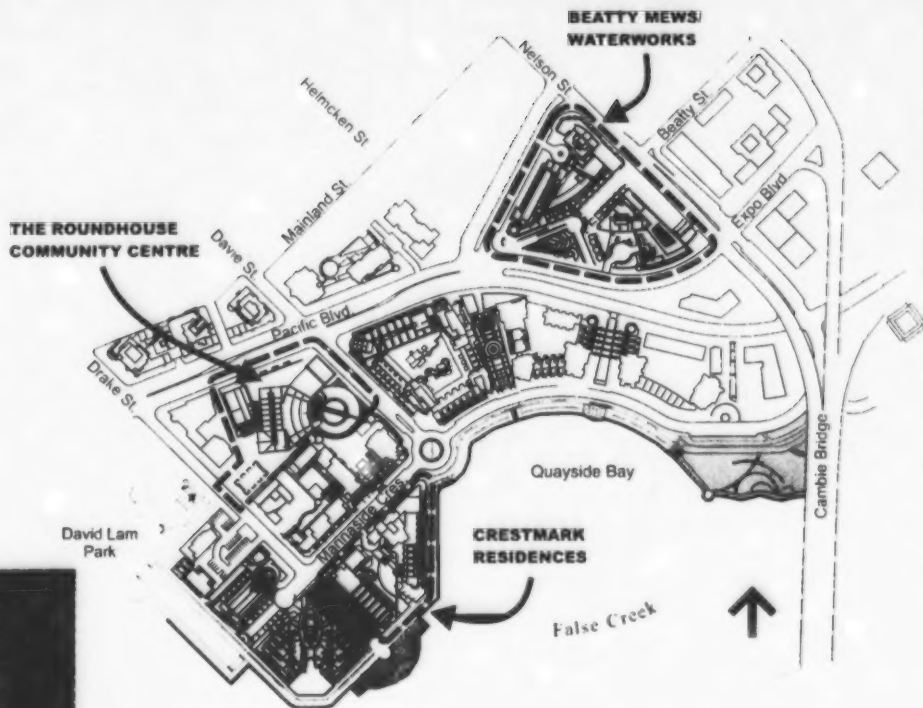
Cambie Street mid-rise massing



3-storey townhouses frame plaza, mews



Beatty Mews



Public space is fully integrated within the project: The public mews along the Beatty Street right-of-way is lined on both sides with three-storey townhouses which have entrances directly off the mews. These help animate the mews and provide "eyes on the street" along this public route. The low scale of buildings is appropriate to this pedestrian-oriented space. Townhouses continue along two sides of the public plaza fronting onto Pacific Boulevard, thus framing this pedestrian meeting space. The plaza is further animated with the location of an outdoor restaurant terrace along one side, the introduction of water and public art, and use of special paving and landscaping.

The landmark tower is notable as a formal response to the powerful axis of Pacific Boulevard. It is oriented and scaled to terminate this visual axis, with the tower's prow shaped footprint responding both to the city street grid and to the curve of Pacific Boulevard. The design maximizes opportunities for incorporating upper level semi-private open spaces, including a second-storey outdoor children's playspace. Parking entrances have been carefully handled with car entry courts off both Cambie Street and Pacific Boulevard, leading to enclosed parkades in screened podiums and below ground.

Overall, this project demonstrates many excellent urban design responses to a very complex set of site conditions. It demonstrates an excellent fit into the existing city fabric, reinforcing the complex geometry of the surrounding streets, and helping to tame major vehicular thoroughfares such as the Cambie Bridge and Pacific Boulevard.



Developer/Client: **Concord Pacific Place for Vancouver Parks Board**  
 Architect: **Baker McGarva Hart**  
 Landscape Architect: **Forma Design Inc.**  
 City Staff: **Jim Lowden (Parks Board)**  
**Ralph Segal (Development Planner)**  
**Pat Wotherspoon (Area Planner)**  
**Robert Lemon (Heritage Planner)**  
 Date of completion: **1997**

**PROJECT DATA**

Zoning: CD-1  
 Site area: 97,760 sq. ft.  
 FSR: 0.5  
 Use: Community Centre  
 Floor area: 49,300 sq. ft.  
 Height: 36 ft.



'Heritage Yard'



Drake Street entry to 'Neighbourhood Yard'

The Roundhouse Community Centre is an innovative integration of a restored heritage building with a new building. The original buildings are remnants of the C. P. Railway's False Creek maintenance complex and engine turntable, dating back to 1889. In 1985 the complex was restored for use during Expo '86 by Hotson Bakker Architects. The Community Centre additions include a new gymnasium wing oriented towards Pacific Boulevard, and a new roundhouse bay at Davie Street which now houses the historic Engine 374. The project is part of an urban design masterplan for this new 75 acre neighbourhood of 3,000 units completed to date between the Cambie Bridge and David Lam Park. Its design highlights the railway origins of the building while also providing a strong identity for its new role as the centre of this emerging community.

Key urban design issues for this project were adaptive re-use of existing buildings, and design response to a heritage context. The architects have responded by creating new additions which respect and reference the original structures, but without mimicry. New construction is clearly delineated from old with the use of steel, glass and differently coloured brick. New building elements are robust enough to be tolerant of the expected diversity of uses over time, yet modestly detailed so as not to compete with the heritage structures. Especially successful in this regard is the simple yet well-detailed new Engine 374 pavilion at the Davie/Pacific Boulevard corner - a glass skin enclosing a heavy timber structure which supports a simple flat roof. The heavy timber 'tree/trestle' structure recalls the original railway's wood construction and the heavy timber structure of the adjacent historic building. The articulation of the new brick and glass gymnasium wing, with its 'swallow' roof and clerestory windows, responds to the scale and texture of the new residential surroundings while also reflecting the variance in colour and texture of the older buildings.

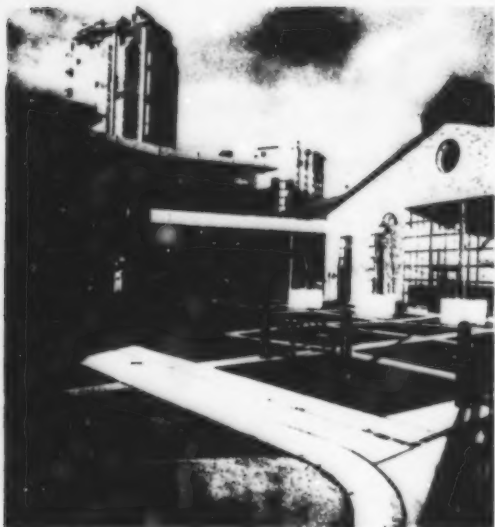
The design addresses three different streets: Davie, Pacific Boulevard and Drake Street. The strategy to re-establish the identity of this heritage building in its radically new urban context and resolve the multiple front/back nature of the facility on its facing streets was to create three distinct 'yards' that anchor the Roundhouse to the new street grid and expand its presence towards these three street fronts: a 'Heritage Yard' which holds the historic turntable fronting Davie Street; the 'Street Yard' fronting onto Pacific Boulevard; and the 'Neighbourhood Yard' on Drake Street through which is located the main building entry. Each yard is marked on its

BAEER MCGARVA HART PHOTO



Engine 374 pavilion

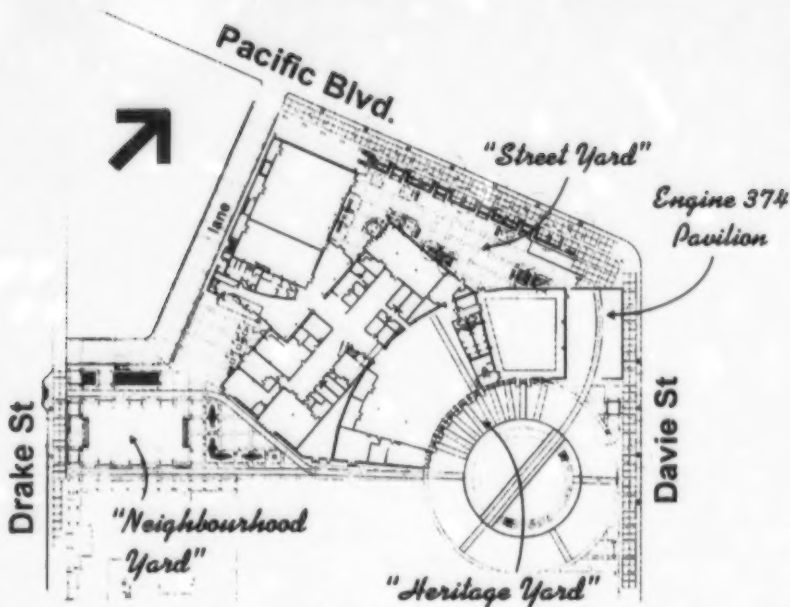
BAEER MCGARVA HART PHOTO



Main entry from lane



'Street Yard' on Pacific Blvd.



street front by brick and timber gantry/pavilions. Deliberately 'incomplete' and somewhat heroic in scale, these elements imply a larger volume within which the Roundhouse sits.

The Heritage Yard facing Davie street is highlighted by the backdrop of the curved facade of the original building. With the adjacent new retail podium arcade echoing the centre's curved facade, and the engine turntable at its centre, this is a very inviting, well defined space. A new 'Gateway' tower element, broad steps up from the sidewalk, and continuous street trees extend the positive street edge while maintaining visibility of the centre's most prominent heritage facade. This yard, bridging commercial and community realms, works especially well for public events. When the yard is unoccupied, the Engine 374 pavilion and the turntable recall the memory of the historic activity on this site.

The gantries along the Pacific Boulevard 'Street Yard' straddle the modest grade change from the sidewalk down to the Roundhouse. They reinforce the continuity of spatial enclosure of Pacific Boulevard as the neighbourhood's "High Street" and connect the building to the street edge. This creates a protected sunken courtyard for community centre activities to spill out into. The cleft between the old and new buildings provides a secondary entrance that gives the Roundhouse a 'front' aspect onto Pacific Boulevard.

The 'Neighbourhood Yard' at Drake Street is the community's front door to the Roundhouse. The street pergola, the adjacent arcade, raised lawn, rail track and paving grid refer to the former utilization of the site by railway buildings and create a sunny welcoming courtyard for arrival, gathering and play.

This complex of buildings from different times and of differing uses has a strength and simplicity of design which both respects the historic legacy of the site and anticipates a broad range of public uses in the future. The project reclaims a significant symbol of the city's history for public amenity and enjoyment. As the neighbourhood develops around the community centre and the building becomes more heavily used, the various design strategies and devices will enable it to blend with its context, lending the building an air of inevitability and continuity.



Developer/Owner: **Parksonia Enterprises**  
 Architect: **James Cheng Architects**  
 Landscape Architect: **Phillips Farevaag Smallerberg**  
 City Staff: **Jonathan Barrett (Development Planner)**  
**Pat Wotherspoon (Area Planner)**  
 Date of completion: **1993**

**PROJECT DATA**

Zoning: CD-1  
 Site area: 60,200 sq. ft.  
 FSR: 5.94  
 Use: Residential and commercial  
 Floor area: 357,500 sq. ft.  
 Height: two towers: 290 ft. & 257 ft.



JAMES CHENG ARCHITECTS PHOTO

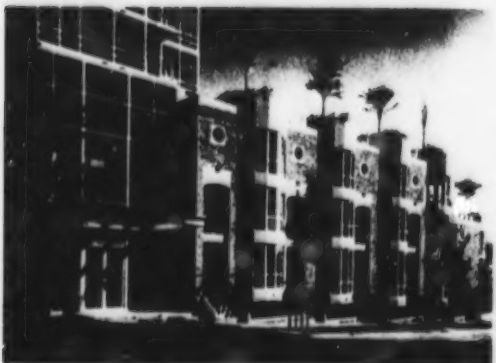
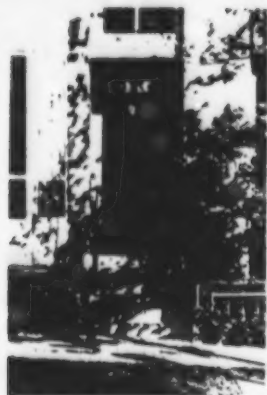
**T**his project forms a key component of the redevelopment of the Southeast Granville Slopes area, between Burrard and Granville Bridges, to high density urban housing. The rectangular site below Beach Avenue between Hornby and Howe Streets is prominently visible from False Creek and Granville Island. Directly to the north is the recently completed Granville Slopes public park.

The project consists of two residential highrise towers (31 and 18 storeys) rising out of predominantly lowrise street-oriented townhouse forms. The lowrise built form at the perimeter ranges from three to seven floors, with three storey townhouses on the east, west and south sides and four storey apartments over townhouses on the north edge, facing the park. A small amount of commercial retail and office space is included around the Beach/Hornby corner, at street and upper levels.

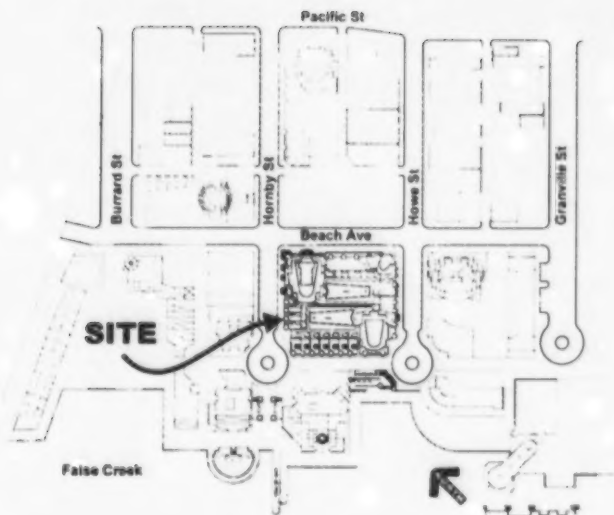
A somewhat daunting list of key urban design challenges included:

- developing a coherent, pedestrian-scaled built form relationship to the surrounding streets and pedestrian walkway, with direct street addresses for residences;
- accommodating a substantial amount of density on a prominent site adjacent the water;
- protecting views from Granville Bridge and Granville Island to the mountains;
- integrating into an emerging high density highrise residential neighbourhood;
- maximizing views through the block; and
- minimizing shadowing and maximizing visual privacy.

This is one of Vancouver's earliest efforts at creating street-oriented urban row-housing, which defines the street and creates pedestrian-level interest and surveillance (safety). The two north-south streets and southerly waterfront Ocean Avenue mews elevation are particularly successful, with the use of brick cladding adding to the quality of the streetscape. The transition from public sidewalk to private front door is finely calibrated, with use of classic urban design devices such as grade changes, bay windows, screening, and recessed front stoops. The retail element, while small, is well located in the most appropriate corner of the site, fronting Beach Avenue, at Hornby Street.



Hornby Street Townhouses



JAMES CHENG ARCHITECTS ILLUSTRATION

The towers are appropriately sited to maximize separation and unit outlook, with the taller one set further back from the waterfront. Given the exceptionally high density imposed by the zoning for this site, the bulk and mass of the towers have been carefully articulated to minimize their apparent volume relative to neighbouring buildings and the adjacent sidewalks. This has been achieved with curving facades, bay windows, numerous balconies and the use of a very light colour palette. Hand railing design lends the project an appropriately nautical air.

The interior courtyards are beautifully landscaped, although designed primarily to be appreciated by the residents as semi-private gardens. No public views into or through the site have been provided, although narrow gaps from Hornby and Howe Streets give restricted visual access.

This project constituted an exemplary response to the area specific Southeast Granville Slopes urban design masterplan and was an important harbinger of high density urban housing in downtown Vancouver. It provided many lessons for addressing the increasing conflicts which come with maintaining livability and making a positive contribution to the public streetscape in the face of increased density.



Landscaped inner courtyard enhances livability in this high density development.

JAMES CHING ARCHITECTS PHOTO



Howe and Beach Avenue corner treatment.



Townhouse porches, steps and planters front directly onto the street.

Developer/Owner: **Concord Pacific**  
 Architect: **Downs Archambault & Partners**  
 Landscape Architect: **Harold Neufeldt**  
 Public Artist: **Barbara Steinman**  
 City Staff: **Ralph Segal (Development Planner)**  
**Pat Wotherspoon, Ian Smith (Area Planners)**  
 Year of completion: **1997**

**PROJECT DATA**

Zoning: CD-1  
 Site area: 85,090 sq. ft.  
 FSR: 3.3  
 Use: residential  
 Floor area: 283,000 sq. ft.  
 Height: 200 ft.



POWELL PHOTOGRAPHY

**T**his residential development is located on the waterfront block between Drake and Davie Streets fronting onto False Creek, and consists, on its northern half, of a 22-storey tower which sits atop a six-storey podium terracing down to a row of four-storey townhouses along the waterfront walkway on its diagonal edge. A ten-storey terraced building on the southern half steps down to a six-storey streetwall edge along the principal street, Marinaside Crescent. Between these two distinctive structures is a contained semi-private open space, designed as a 'West Coast garden courtyard'.

The 'Crestmark' project is notable from a number of urban design standpoints:

- it demonstrates how appropriately scaled and treated buildings along a variety of edges (park, street and waterfront) can enhance the public realm;
- it protects an important public view corridor of "The Lions" peaks from the south shore of False Creek;
- it successfully addresses the transition between public and private open space; and
- it accomplishes the difficult scale transition between highrise tower forms and lowrise elements.

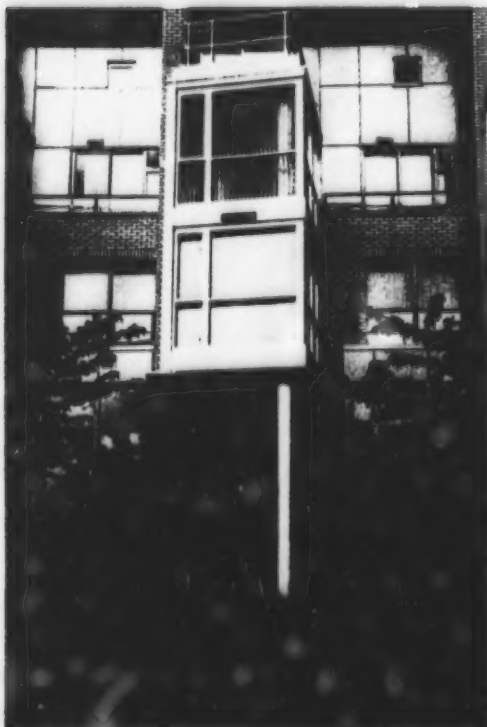
Each of the site's different edge conditions is addressed uniquely: Along the 'Drake Mews' park edge a ten storey building frames the street-end view corridor down to the water. Strongly articulated individual two-storey ground-oriented units are set back about 12 ft. from the public right-of-way and raised about three ft. above grade, with individual front entries from the park. The building, whose architecture evokes boat-like images, terraces down from ten storeys to four adjacent the waterfront, thus enhancing the sense of openness at the water and maximizing views.

Along the waterfront, the townhouse units are again individually articulated in their massing, set well back and raised up from the public waterfront, to create a clear separation of public and private realms. A semi-public secondary walkway mediates between the public walkway/bikeway and the residential units. Individual front terraces, and use of low walls and hedges contribute to the delineation of public and semi-private realms, while maintaining "eyes on the street".



Water feature of "West Coast" garden courtyard





Along Marinaside Crescent, both buildings present a continuous six storey streetwall with two-storey townhouse units at grade, which help to define and contain the street space, while creating a sense of domesticity on the street with the townhouse front doors lining the sidewalk. Both main lobbies to the upper apartments are on Marinaside Crescent, as is the well-screened entrance to underground parking off a vehicular court, thus reinforcing the public primacy of the street. At the Davie Street end, the building acknowledges the sites triangular geometry with a sharply rounded corner element.

Public views towards the water are maintained from Marinaside Crescent through the semi-public garden space between the two buildings. This space is treated as an extension of the waterfront environment, with a water feature cascading down - and visually under the waterfront walkway - into False Creek.

In addition to its exemplary response to the area specific Roundhouse Neighbourhood Urban Design Guidelines, this project demonstrates sound urban design qualities of neighbourliness and enhancement of public realm, views, access and waterfront amenity. At the same time, it maximizes the positive qualities of privacy, security, sunlight penetration and views for the private residences. The project is a good example of carefully scaled development which sensitively extends the city's built fabric down to the waterfront.

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# 'The Crestmark'

1200 MARINASIDE CRESCENT





Waterfront townhouses



Marinaside Crescent streetwall with 2-storey townhouses



Drake Mews townhouses

Developer/Owner: **Marathon Realty Ltd./City of Vancouver**  
 Urban Design: **Civitas Urban Design & Planning**  
 Landscape Architect: **(Concept Plan) Phillips Wuori Long Inc.**  
 Landscape Architect: **(Detailed Design) Phillips Farevaag Smallerberg**  
 City Staff: **Jim Lowden, Kate Davis-Johnson (Parks Board),  
 Mike Kemble, Ian Smith (Area Planners)  
 Michelle Blake (Projects Engineer)**  
 Year of completion: **1997**

**PROJECT DATA**

Use: Public seawalk/bikeway  
 Length: 1,600 ft. (Phase I)  
 Width: 35 ft.



**T**he Marina Neighbourhood is the first phase of Marathon's Coal Harbour waterfront development between Cardero and Jervis Streets. The first component of the public park and waterfront walkway sets the standard for public open space design of Vancouver's emerging urban waterfront along Coal Harbour.

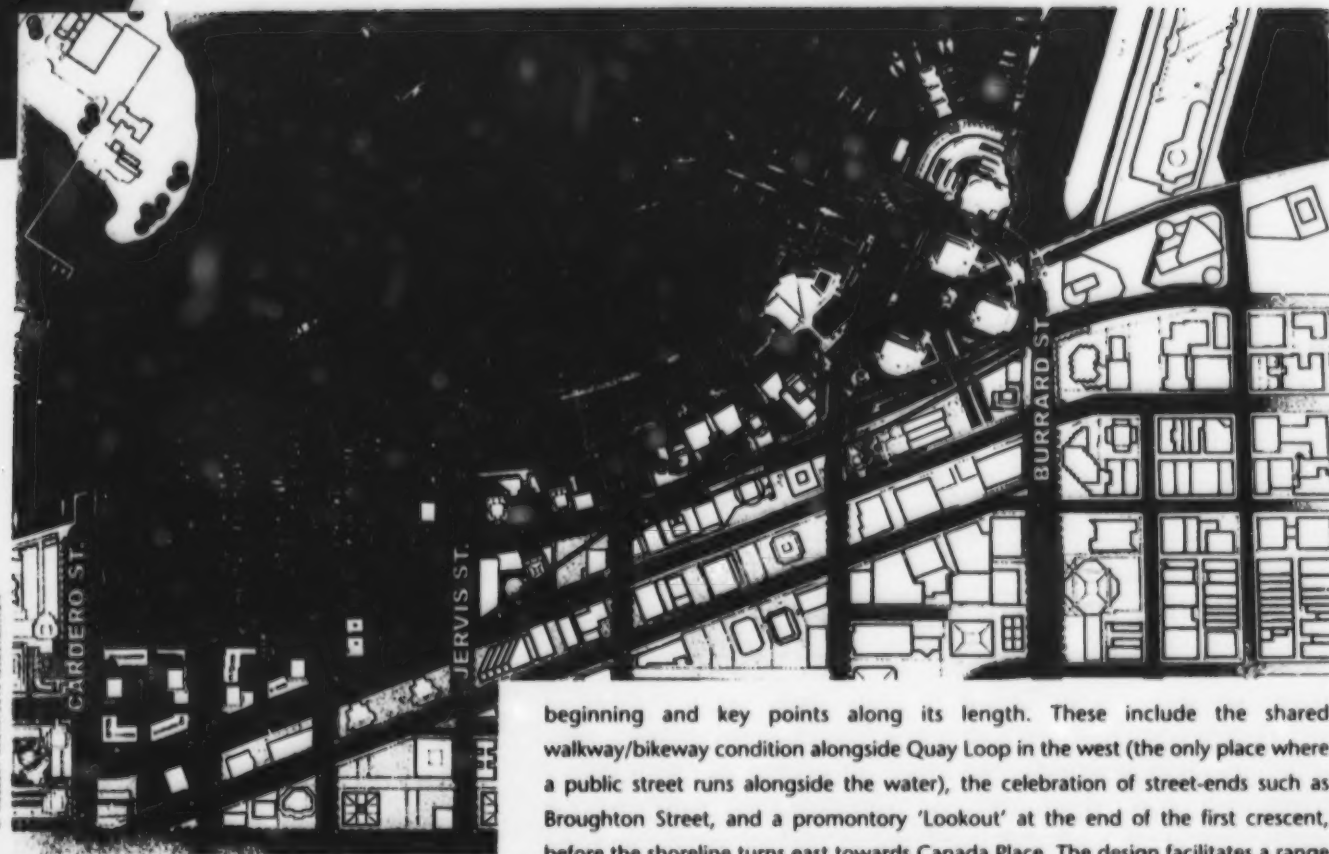
The Marina Neighbourhood waterfront walkway extends about four city blocks around a curved water basin filled with pleasure craft and charter boats. The walkway also continues into the first phase of the future eight acre Harbour Green waterfront park, and will eventually extend to Burrard Street.

Key urban design challenges for this project included:

- understanding the site's identity and historical context, and reflecting these elements in a contemporary manner;
- responding to the surrounding context that is quite diverse, with a high-density residential area to the immediate south, the complexity of marina facilities, boats and buildings to the north, the downtown commercial core to the southeast, and the Bayshore resort hotel and residential area to the immediate west;
- threading in a bicycle route within a highly pedestrianized plan;
- accommodating the substantial grade change between the upland escarpment and the waterfront level. (This grade differential increases from west to east, and was a key determinant in the overall design.)
- designing a public space as foreground for buildings which don't yet exist; and
- connecting the waterfront walkway back into the downtown street grid.

The solution is a shoreline design which is robust yet flexible, permitting different responses to different future buildings, water's edge conditions and open spaces. A simple set of design moves was established, accommodating both pedestrians and bicycles and connecting back to the city street grid.

The designers were anxious to ensure a waterfront which was truly public, safe and accessible. They have created an entirely new shoreline configuration in a bold series of crescents which define water basins and maximize public access and water use opportunities. This shape gives clear form to the waterfront walkway's



Coal Harbour Urban Design Concept Plan



Separated bikeway

beginning and key points along its length. These include the shared walkway/bikeway condition alongside Quay Loop in the west (the only place where a public street runs alongside the water), the celebration of street-ends such as Broughton Street, and a promontory 'Lookout' at the end of the first crescent, before the shoreline turns east towards Canada Place. The design facilitates a range of adjacent water uses such as marina commercial, restaurant, and charter moorage. The project also incorporates crime prevention strategies in its landscape design to minimize unsupervised open space and opportunities for crime.

These responses to diverse context conditions help make the waterfront walkway both eventful and meaningful, and celebrate the surrounding city context. Public street-end view corridors are protected, and bold landscape design gestures recall the site's context and history, such as representation of the original 'shoreline' and escarpment edge through the parkspace by means of low, curving walls. Wider walkway sections herald each street-end, and accommodate adjustable ramps down to the water. These promontories are used as threshold and orientation points, and help tie the waterfront back into the fabric of the city.

The overall waterfront walkway system is typically 35 feet wide to accommodate both pedestrians and cyclists. However, in the westerly section of the route this has been reduced to 25 feet by using the adjacent street sidewalk on Quay Loop. Different paving materials identify the pedestrian and bicycle zones.

Around the marina edge both designers and City staff felt it important to create a high quality seawall edge - in precast patterned concrete - which is very visible because of both the curved shoreline and Vancouver's high tidal range. In addition, street furniture, pedestrian lighting, trees and public art were integrated into a cohesive design recalling the heritage quality of nearby walkway areas in Stanley Park. Attention to detail, the use of durable, solid materials, and insistence on excellence in design by both City staff and the client, has resulted in a very handsome benchmark for future phases of Vancouver's urban waterfront.



Owner: **The Residences on Georgia Ltd. Partnership**  
 Architect: **James Cheng Architects**  
 Landscape Architect: **Phillips Farevaag Smallerberg**  
 Public Artist: **Dale Chihuly**  
 City Staff: **Jonathan Barrett (Development Planner)**  
**Robert Lemon (Heritage Planner)**  
 Year of completion: **1998**

**PROJECT DATA**

Zoning: CD-1  
 Site area: 60,600 sq. ft.  
 FSR: 6.6  
 Use: residential  
 Floor area: 397,600 sq. ft.  
 Height: 331 ft.



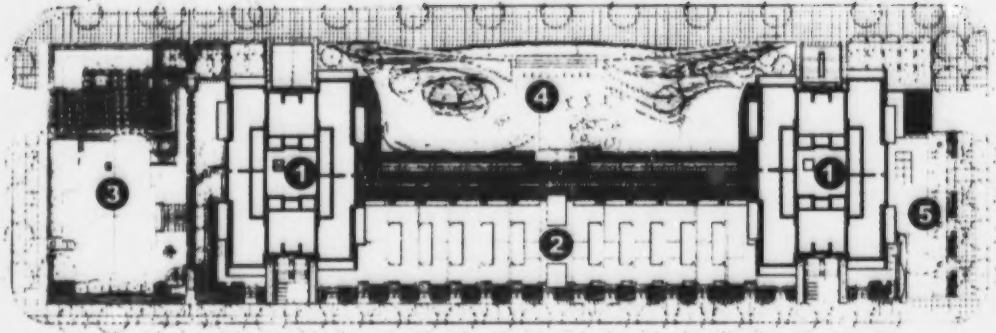
PETER ARON &amp; SOTO PHOTOGRAPHY

The 'Residences' on Georgia Street is a noteworthy high density residential development in downtown Vancouver. It is comprised of two 34-storey towers, three-storey townhouses, and the restoration and conversion of a heritage house on the site into five condominium apartments. The site is strategically located on Vancouver's premier downtown ceremonial route: Georgia Street. The project also faces Alberni Street, a smaller-scaled local-serving street. A key urban design challenge was how to respond to these two very different street conditions. Other urban design issues included:

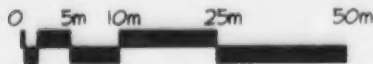
- responding to a transitional location between the Central Business District and the high density 'Triangle West' residential area;
- reinforcing the emerging character of Alberni Street as a pedestrian environment;
- addressing Bute Street as a pedestrian corridor which links the West End with the new Coal Harbour waterfront;
- respecting the on-site heritage Abbott House;
- relationship to and impacts on adjacent existing residential towers; and
- responding to the 1986 "Georgia Street - 2nd Century" urban design guidelines.

The urban design responses are exemplary. The two handsome towers are oriented towards Georgia Street, where they contribute to the street's character as a tower-lined grand boulevard. The towers are separated by a raised private green court opening onto Georgia Street. This gesture echoes the recommended site planning approach described in the visionary 'Georgia Street - 2nd Century' Guidelines. The green court, with its cascading water wall along the sidewalk edge and lush landscaping, also creates an elegant foil to busy Georgia Street, and screens the townhousing that extends between the towers. Sidewalk treatment along Georgia Street is consistent with the City's enhanced design standard for continuous special treatment along the entire length of this ceremonial street.

The towers have been carefully located about 200 feet apart to minimize view impacts from adjacent upland towers. The east tower is also set back from Bute Street to enhance this street's role as a pedestrian connector down to Coal Harbour. This edge of the site has been designed with a broad, generously landscaped sidewalk, steps and landscaping and a public art installation, consistent with the site to the south across Alberni Street. The west tower in turn is set well back from Jervis Street so that the restored Abbott House is not overwhelmed.



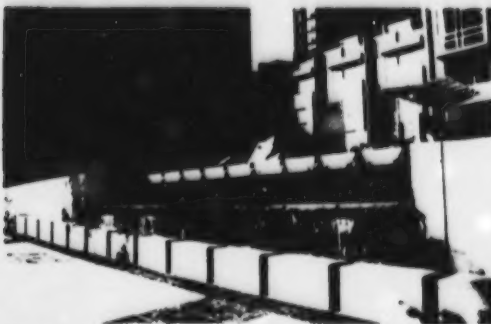
SITE PLAN



- ① Twin 34-Storey Towers
- ② 3-Storey Townhouses
- ③ Abbott House
- ④ "Green Court" Landscaping and Water Feature
- ⑤ Public Realm Setback with Public Art Feature



Abbott House



Georgia Street water feature

The townhouses front onto Alberni Street, and add significantly to this street's emerging residential character. They also contribute to public safety by creating 'eyes on the street'. The units are repetitively articulated and scaled to respond to the narrower, lower-scaled Alberni Street. Each 15 foot-wide unit has direct front door access from the sidewalk. The ground floor is raised up a few feet from grade in the traditional "porch" or "stoop" arrangement, and screened by a low retaining wall, railing and small landscaped front yard, thus creating a handsome transition between the public sidewalk zone and the private front door. Finally, sidewalk treatment includes regularly spaced street trees in a narrow grassed boulevard behind the curb, reinforcing the residential character of the street. This 'green' street edge extends to all residential sites in the nearby "Triangle West" neighbourhood as part of a coordinated public realm plan.

Key urban design lessons drawn from this project include:

- the value of housing downtown as a key to Vancouver's success as a vibrant city;
- the importance of landscaping in high density projects, to create a green space oasis;
- the value of simple urban design rules being well executed, such as the townhousing treatment along Alberni Street, the appropriate height of, and distance between, tower elements, the clear delineation between public and private zones, and the sidewalk streetscape treatment on different streets; and
- the incorporation of special public realm treatments for the sidewalk area that carefully integrates with on-site landscaping and pavement treatments.

The 'Residences on Georgia' does all of this and more, and demonstrates not only an exemplary response to the City's Georgia Street urban design guidelines but a keen understanding of good urban design in a high density urban context.



Bute Street public realm



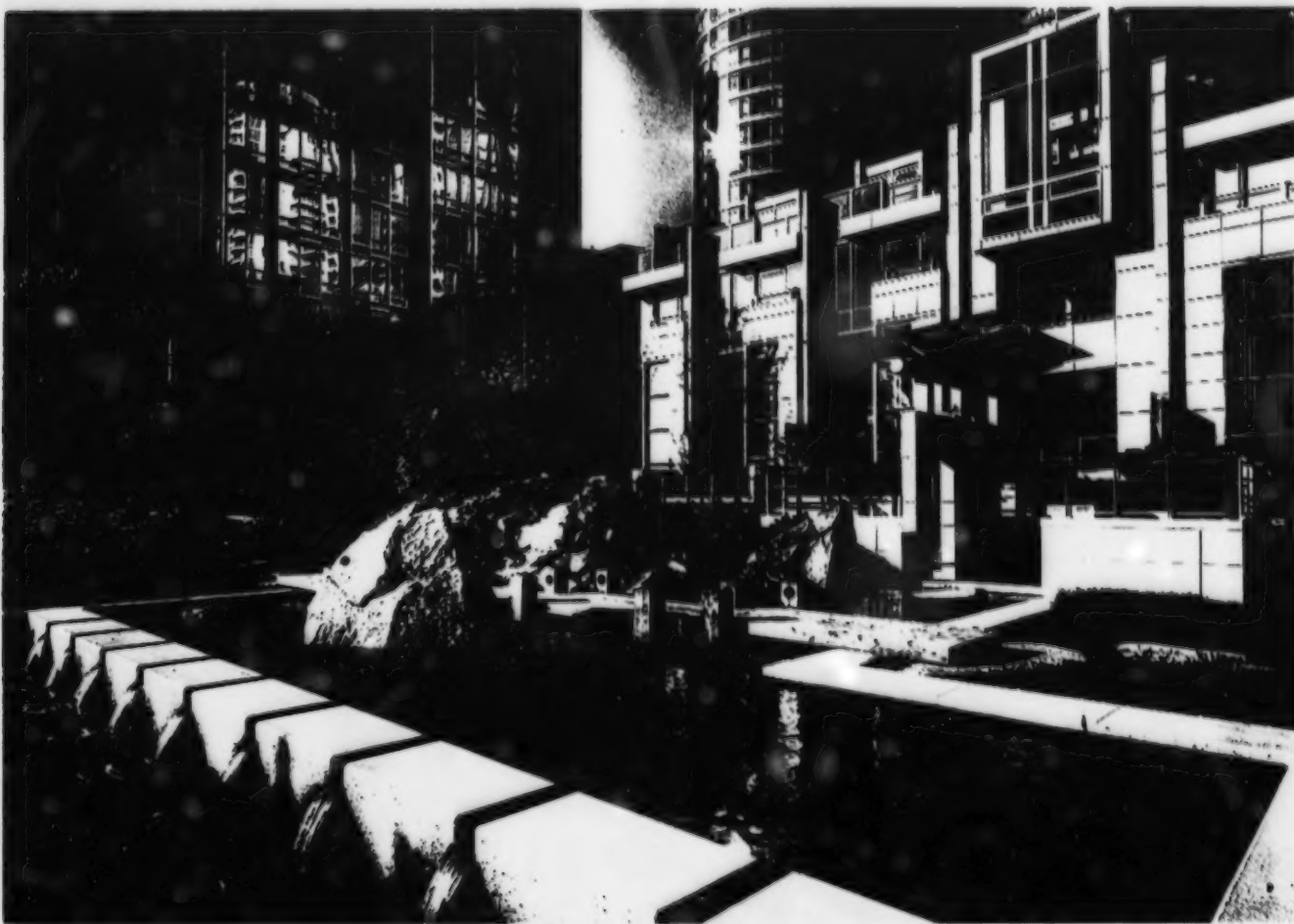
PETER AARON W. LTD PHOTOGRAPHY



Alberni Street townhouses



Georgia Street public realm



Georgia Street 'green court'

Developer/Owner: **Central City Mission**  
 Architect: **Neale Staniszkis Doll Adams Architects**  
 Landscape Architect: **Guzzi Perry Ltd.**  
 City Staff: **Jonathan Barrett (Development Planner)**  
**John Jessup (Housing Planner)**  
 Year of completion: **1996**

**PROJECT DATA**

Zoning:	Downtown District (DD)
Site area:	15,600 sq. ft.
FSR:	4.8
Use:	Special Needs residential
Floor area:	74,400 sq. ft.
Height:	95 ft.



Pender Street facade continues historic streetwall

This project for a special needs residential and alcohol recovery care facility is located in the downtown inner city neighbourhood of Victory Square, on the northwest corner of Homer and Pender Streets. The 125 ft. x 120 ft. site slopes down about ten feet from Pender Street to the lane. The surrounding urban context is defined by older buildings up to nine storeys, many of which are heritage listed. Buildings in the area typically use the full site area, and come right out to the property line. The unusually complicated building program, tight urban site, and surrounding heritage context, all posed major urban design constraints.

The architects have employed several key urban design strategies to address the site constraints, including:

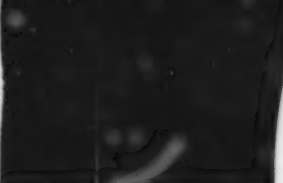
- acknowledging the historical context while creating a contemporary urban design;
- continuance of the pattern of adjacent development in terms of scale and massing;
- differential treatment of the two street facades to reflect differing conditions;
- exploiting the slope by stepping the building height down to the lane; and
- creating a positive pedestrian interface at street level.

The building houses about 120 residents. It is H-shaped, and is comprised of a seven-storey wing facing Pender Street to the south, a six-storey wing facing the lane to the north, and - along the easterly Homer Street elevation - a three-storey element screening the internal courtyard and connecting these two wings. A connecting wing along the west side completes the assembly, with a secondary light well separating it from the adjacent Montgomery Hotel's windows which look onto the site.

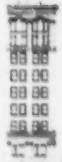
The project is notable for the effort expended in creating an appropriate contextual fit, particularly with the adjacent 8-storey Montgomery Hotel, which is a listed heritage building. This has been done in several ways through the building's siting, massing and choice of materials, including:

- continuing the building line along both Pender and Homer streets, with the new building coming right out to the sidewalk, thus helping to define the street edge and providing continuity of built form;

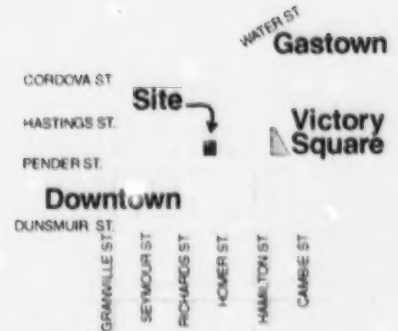
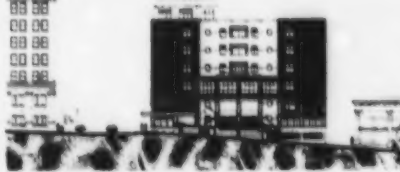




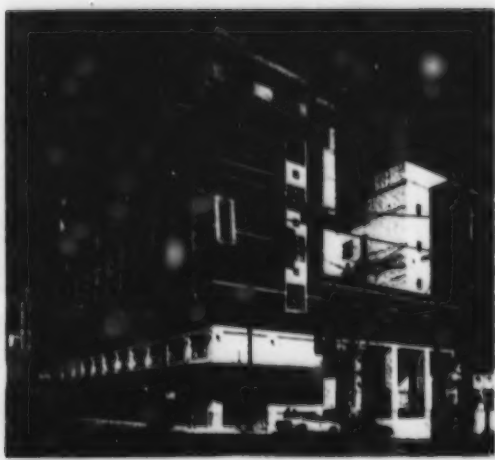
North Elevation



East Elevation



NEAL STANISLAUS DOLL ADAMS ARCHITECTS PHOTO



- echoing the vertical bays of the Montgomery in the fenestration rhythm along Pender;
- achieving a continuity of scale by carrying the cornice line of the adjacent Montgomery Hotel across the new facade on Pender Street; and
- providing masonry and tile cladding to suggest the stability and permanence appropriate to urban buildings, and to relate the project to its heritage setting.

The building's principal facade has a very clearly defined base, middle section and top, which helps the building fit into its surrounding context of traditional structures, all of which have similar tripartite facade treatments. The top floor is carefully set back and capped with a broad overhanging cornice, which further enhances the building's profile and recalls the traditional profiles of surrounding older buildings.

The building program has been zoned horizontally, with amenity and activity spaces grouped on the ground floor to provide visual interest and augment the existing Pender Street 'storefront' experience for pedestrians. Continuous weather protection is provided along Pender Street, and returns around the Homer Street corner.

In keeping with the sensitivities of the building's program, separate, discrete entrances have been provided for the different program components. These are handled very carefully, with appropriately little attention being drawn to them.

The Homer Street facade helps to screen the raised private inner courtyard, while still permitting sunlight to penetrate this important open space amenity. This sunny, protected courtyard provides a secure outdoor open space with seating and good livability for fragile residents. The facade incorporates a third floor bridge connecting the Pender Street and lane wings, thus providing the required 'wandering loop' for psycho-geriatric residents.

The Central City Lodge is a textbook example of creating an appropriate 'background' building rather than a 'monument', that is, a building which integrates respectfully into its surrounding context and contributes to the city's urban fabric. At the same time, it creates an especially livable and supportive environment for residents with very special needs.

NEAL STANISLAUS DOLL ADAMS ARCHITECTS PHOTO



Homer Street courtyard and bridge

Developer/Client: **Pan Pacific Developments**  
 Concept Architect: **Hughes Baldwin Architects**  
 Architect: **Paul Merrick Architects**  
 Landscape Architect: **Phillips Farevaag Smallerberg**  
 City Staff: **Ralph Segal (Development Planner)**  
 Year of completion: **1989**

**PROJECT DATA**

Zoning:	CD-1
Site area:	336,440 sq. ft.
FSR:	2.0
Use:	Retail, office, institutional
Floor area:	685,000 sq. ft.
Height:	75 ft.



Restored Normal School



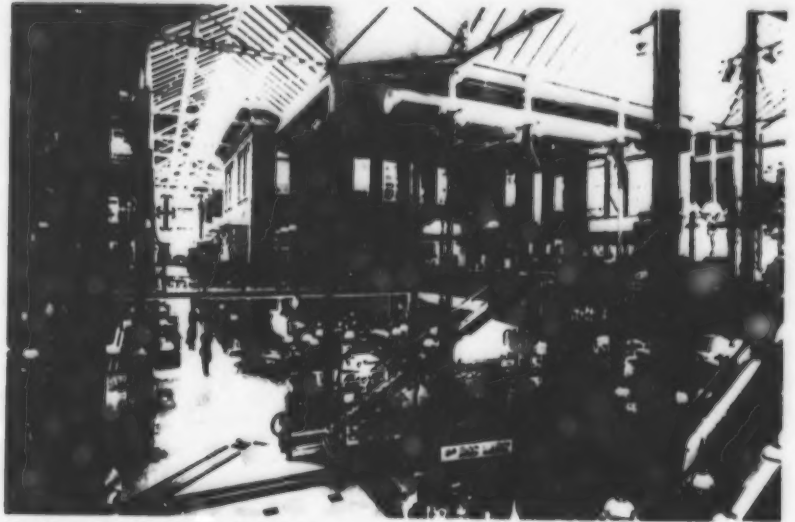
12th Avenue addition

City Square integrates two turn-of-the century stone buildings with new retail, office and educational facilities. Situated on a sloping site opposite Vancouver City Hall at 12th and Cambie, the project occupies a very visible, historic site demanding sensitive treatment. The program was an innovative mix accommodating such disparate elements as retail shopping, restaurants, offices, a private college and a supermarket, as well as substantial parking. The residential development on the north half of the block was executed by others but is consistent with the "master plan" for the full block.

Key urban design issues included heritage preservation, tree retention and architectural character, all within the context of adding density to the site. As well, the project integrates with and anchors redevelopment of the entire block. This includes creating pedestrian linkages down to West 10th Avenue, along the east-west "11th Avenue" right of way which bisects the site north of City Square, and down to the public green and daycare centre located across from the east-west route in the adjacent development on the northern block.

The massing of new elements along West 12th Avenue responds well to the existing old school buildings. Their height is carefully modulated so as not to overwhelm the heritage structures: a three-storey cornice line is established against the West 12th Avenue commercial edge, above which the building steps back to the sixth floor roof. The building then terraces down towards the heritage buildings, and is linked to them by an intervening lightweight steel framed and expansively glazed atrium. This atrium creates an interior public pedestrian street connecting Cambie and Ash Streets, lined with two levels of shops and a food fair. While the grade level retail works well as the public heart of the project, the upper level commercial space has been less successful.

The atrium also connects outside to the mid-block east-west pedestrian mews which runs along the north side of the project and links up to the larger pedestrian system through the Vancouver General Hospital complex, as well as north, down to West 10th Avenue. This mid-block route has been carefully designed to preserve and integrate a row of large older trees, including a magnificent, red oak tree at its eastern (Cambie Street) end. Here, the architects have carefully organized the parking entrances to avoid the tree roots, thereby protecting the tree. Pedestrian



Interior public atrium with glazed roof



"11th Avenue" pedestrian mews



12th Avenue public realm

linkages through the site are a key element in the urban design success of this project. Outside pedestrian streetscape treatment is of a high standard all around the project, and integrates special paving, lighting and street furniture. The "11th Avenue" east-west mews is especially well-resolved, with a central grassed boulevard, benches overlooking the city and of course the existing mature trees. This space provides the city with a rare example of a real pedestrian mews, which sets off the old school buildings very handsomely, and also connects via a set of wide steps down to West 10th Avenue. In good weather, this space is well patronized by customers of City Square as well as local residents and office workers.

Parking is very well handled, with a multi-level underground structure which is accessed from the Cambie and Ash Street ends. The West 12th Avenue frontage is thus unbroken, and allows for a drop-off bay for buses and taxis at the atrium entrance, as well as continuous special paving, trees and landscape along this street.

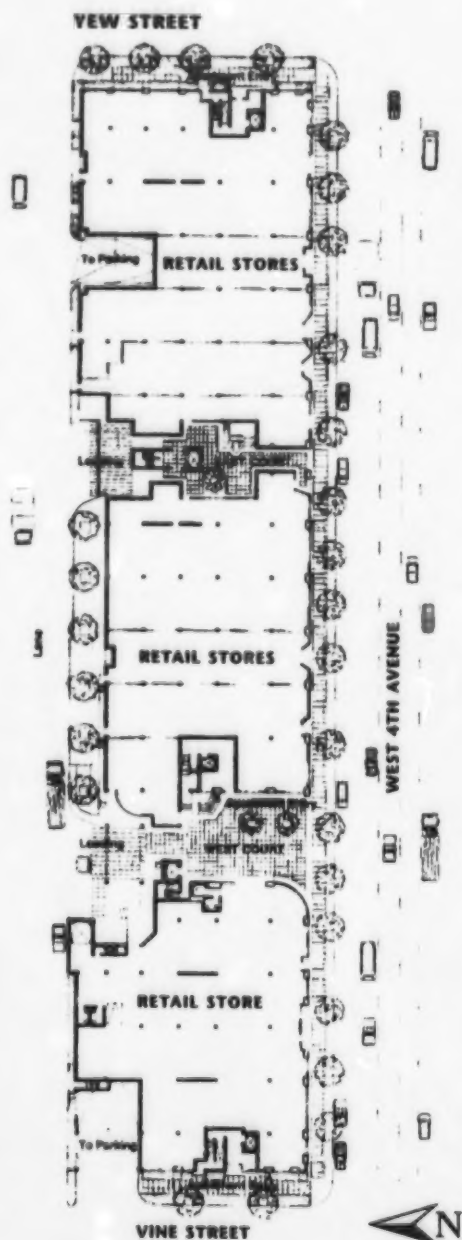
Another key urban design achievement involves how the project incorporates the supermarket anchor tenant. Typically, this kind of store is highly visible from the street and surrounded by acres of surface parking which interrupts retail continuity. At City Square however, the store has been cleverly integrated within the overall massing of the project by locating it at the lower level, thus considerably minimizing the bulk of this component and allowing for a much more urban built form solution. In addition, the project meets the supermarket parking criteria by carefully locating all parking beneath the building, including beneath one of the old schools, and with garage entrances taking full advantage of the slope. This aspect of the project serves as a potential prototype or model for the integration of supermarkets into inner-city urban environments.

Overall, City Square displays an impressive range of successful urban design strategies. It represents a level of urban design sophistication which increasingly will be called upon as the city matures and becomes more urbanized.

Developer/Owner: **Salt Lick Projects Ltd.**  
 Architect: **Hotson Bakker Architects**  
 Landscape Architect: **Durante Kreuk Ltd.**  
 City Staff: **Ralph Segal, Margaret Sutherland (Dev. Planners)**  
 Year of completion: **1995**

**PROJECT DATA**

Zoning: C-2B  
 Site area: 55,500 sq. ft.  
 FSR: 2.5  
 Use: Retail, office, residential  
 Floor area: 138,800 sq. ft.  
 Height: 50 ft.



One of Vancouver's most successful mixed use projects, the 'Capers Block' development is a textbook example of mixed-use densification on a neighbourhood retail street.

The development programme called for retail at grade along West 4th Avenue, with office space on the second floor and two to three floors of residential above that. The site covers the entire north block of West 4th Avenue between Vine and Yew Streets in Vancouver's Kitsilano neighbourhood, at the centre of a vibrant neighbourhood commercial 'High Street'. One of the project's key urban design objectives was to optimize its contribution to this street and to provide street-front, retail continuity. Another urban design objective was to achieve residential intensification, while respecting the existing surrounding residential neighbourhood. The project achieves both objectives admirably.

Significant effort has gone into maximizing retail continuity and providing a pedestrian scale along West 4th Avenue. The building is constructed right to the property line along this street edge thus reinforcing the streetscape and sidewalk continuity. Retail uses front on to the street with a series of relatively narrow 25 foot bay storefronts to provide diversity and pedestrian interest. Traditional storefront windows are used for all shops, with raised masonry sills, recessed front doors and fabric weather awnings, all of which help to integrate with the existing retail street character. The residential lobby entrances are located on the two side streets to avoid disrupting the retail continuity of West 4th Avenue.

A key urban design strategy to deal with the significant length of the project was to break the building into three sections separated by small courtyards. These courtyards, particularly the westerly one adjacent to the Capers store, contribute to the street's pedestrian amenity by providing places to rest and people watch. They also reduce the apparent bulk and length of the building thus further integrating it into the existing, fine-scale character of West 4th Avenue. Yet, the spaces are small enough to maintain the crucial streetfront, retail continuity which is the hallmark of successful urban streets. The retail ground floor is further articulated as a series of diverse shops through the use of different materials, colours and individual signage, rather than "project" storefronts and signage standards.





The second floor office space continues the vertical street line, as does much of the third floor residential. The fourth floor then terraces back from the street, creating decks and reducing the apparent bulk of the building. At the westerly end of the project, an additional fifth floor residential penthouse has been included, which helps anchor this end of the building on the high point of land and maximizes views. The penthouse is set back from West 4th Avenue to minimize its impact. Upper residential units also step back from the northside property line and are oriented around two U-shaped courts. These spaces create light wells at the heart of the building, maximizing northerly views, and increasing sunlight penetration into the units. This strategy also helps reduce view intrusion and overshadowing of the adjacent, single and multi-family residences across the lane.

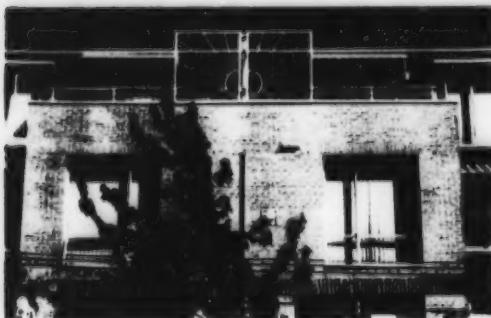
Another key urban design strategy was in dealing with the rear service lane. An attempt was made to treat the lane as a more positive public edge than is typical, through the introduction of landscaping, different paving materials, carefully screened loading bays, and building setbacks. The originally proposed special paving treatment was ultimately replaced with standard asphalt due to functional City Engineering requirements. The mid-block courtyards also provide connections back to the lane, thereby introducing a fine-grained, pedestrian network into the block.

An important aspect of the project is its component of environmental sustainability. It responds to environmental sustainability objectives not only by being dense, fine-grained and of mixed use, but also by using a renewable, passive energy source (ground-source heat pump system) for heating and cooling the complex.

The vertical mix of uses is very well handled with a clear separation of entrances, orientation and architectural styles between the commercial and residential zones. The combination of housing over retail shops and offices adds to the vitality and diversity of the street and reinforces this area as a neighbourhood centre. The quality and scale of the project's public and semi-private spaces are very successful. The individual expression of tenants through their storefront designs adds to their distinctiveness and marketability while creating maximum public amenity along the standard width sidewalks. Finally, highly crafted urban design moves are an important lesson in how buildings can act to reinforce the urban fabric in a relatively modest, non-monumental way.



West courtyard open space





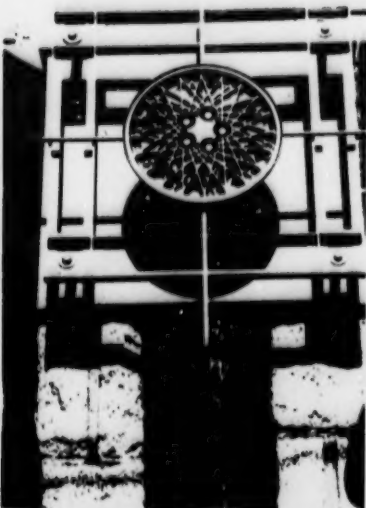


HOUSON BARRIS ARCHITECTS PHOTO

Upper floors terrace back to maintain the pedestrian scale of 4th Avenue and provide sunny roof patios.



Vine Street terraced massing steps down to respect lower density housing to the north.



Decorative metal hubcap details recall the former automotive history of the site



Yew Street facade with generous balconies and tightly spaced street trees to enhance residential livability.

Developer/Owner: **Reuter Developments Ltd.**  
 Architect: **James Hancock Architects Inc.**  
 Landscape Architect: **Wendy Grandin Ltd.**  
 City Staff: **Bob Adair (Development Planner)**  
**Gerry McGeough (Heritage Planner)**  
 Year of completion: **1995**

**PROJECT DATA**

Zoning: RT-6  
 Site area: 12,500 sq. ft.  
 FSR: 0.84  
 Use: Residential  
 Floor area: 9,900 sq. ft.  
 Height: 35 ft.



**T**his project is a textbook example of residential infill to higher densities while respecting and complementing the basic urban design rules of a heritage neighbourhood context. Mount Pleasant is an older inner-city residential neighbourhood of large houses, usually on 50 foot-wide lots, and well established treed streetscapes.

The City's RT-6 zone, which permits a maximum four units per 50 foot-wide lot, and a maximum discretionary density of 0.75 FSR, was interpreted broadly to save an existing older heritage house and permit the demolition of an adjacent house with no heritage value. The combination of the two adjacent 50 foot lots allowed the architect more flexibility in siting the second principal house and two new coach houses to the rear. A total of eight units are accommodated in the two large houses and two coach houses which, although located at the rear lane, are visible from the street.

The challenge was to fit new housing into a well-established heritage streetscape, without overwhelming or clashing with the heritage house. The solution was a new house next to the old which references it in many ways including height, massing, front yard setback, colours and materials, but is itself distinct. Particularly successful is the use of the common space between the two main houses as the shared entrance to both the houses and the coach houses at the rear. The RT-6 zoning guidelines for minimum distances between main buildings and secondary buildings has here resulted in very livable private open space between the houses, with good sun penetration.

Use of the roof space over carports for second floor terraces for the coach houses maximizes the amount of private open space for these small units, which offer a range of unit sizes and layouts.

Key urban design successes are:

- careful siting of the new principal house set back from the street in line with the existing heritage house;
- compatibility in massing, architectural forms and details between the old and new ;
- use of shared spaces between buildings to maximize livability, privacy and sunlight; and
- attention to detail in materials, colour palette and landscaping which all complement the sense of permanence, predominant architectural style, and scale of the street.



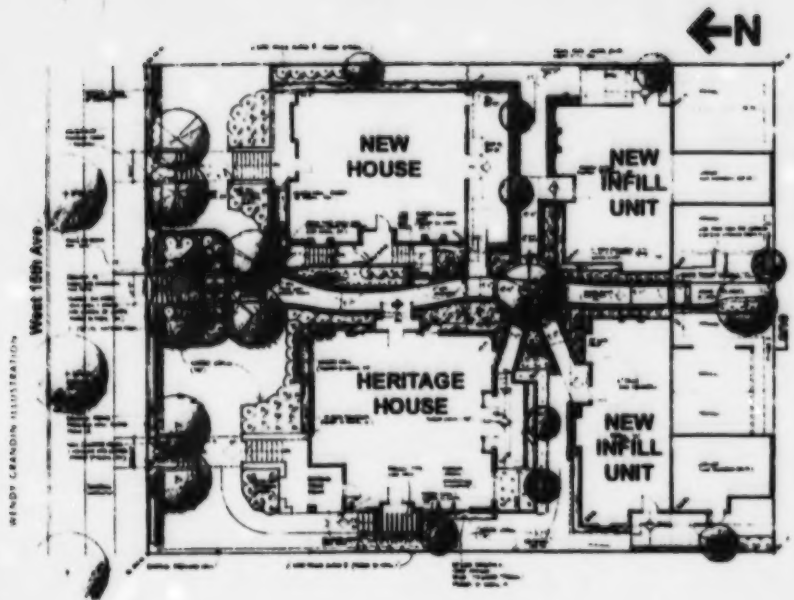
Entry pergola



Rear infill unit



15th Avenue Streetscape (heritage building on right)



The extension of the original low granite retaining wall along the street edge is a key streetscape design strategy to clearly delineate public and private space, which also serves to tie the two principal houses together across the site's width. The careful layering of landscape elements such as the wall, hedge, steps, and entrance portal are further examples of modest means achieving sound urban design results.

Another important urban design strategy successfully demonstrated here is the exploitation of rear lanes for residential frontage in lower density areas. As the city densifies, the potential to utilize lanes is increasingly being recognized with the introduction of 'coach houses', 'granny suites', and home studios supporting a more diverse population and range of land uses, while maintaining the existing rhythm of houses along the front street. Such units will contribute towards the creation of more complete, sustainable communities with a broader range of income levels, age groups, live-work opportunities and family sizes.

The success of projects developed in this zone requires flexibility in interpretation and application of the guidelines. In the case of this project, that flexibility has resulted in the saving of one fine older house and insertion of a handsome new neighbour on the street and two rear infills, all carefully integrated into the surrounding context in a classic demonstration of good urban design.

Developer: **Actual Developments/VanCity Foundation**  
 Architect: **Hughes Baldwin Architects**  
 Landscape Architect: **Phillips Farevaag Smallerberg**  
 City Staff: **Rob Whitlock (Rezoning Planner)**  
**Ralph Segal (Development Planner)**  
 Year of completion: **1997**

**PROJECT DATA**

Zoning: CD-1  
 Site area: 12,450 sq. ft.  
 FSR: 1.26  
 Use: Residential  
 Floor area: 15,700 sq. ft.  
 Height: 39 ft.

**T**his 15-unit multi-family townhouse development is located on a 100 ft. wide x 125 ft. deep lot at the corner of West 10th Avenue and Vine Street, overlooking Connaught Park in the heart of Kitsilano. The site is in a transition zone between mixed commercial/residential development along Broadway, higher density housing on the Arbutus Lands to the east, and single-family and duplex housing to the west.

The project is notable for how it bridges between these higher and lower density housing forms, while maintaining the look and feel of single family housing. It thereby demonstrates how densification adjacent to a public amenity, in this case a major public park, need not upset the character of a neighbourhood. As Vancouver grows, more people will need to use such amenities, and this strategy optimizes their benefits for the maximum number of people.

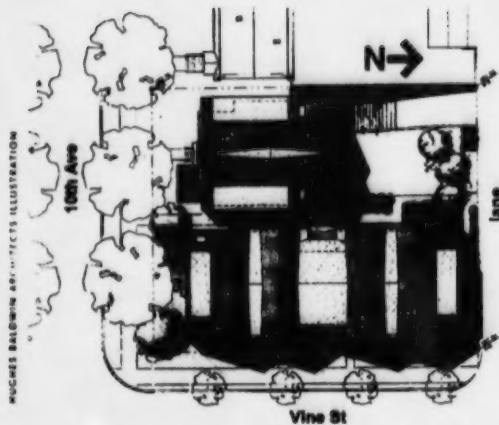
The project achieves densification while maintaining a neighbourhood "fit" through several essential urban design moves. The density is split into two separate buildings, taking advantage of the corner site. This allows the buildings to take on a smaller, domestic scale, more in keeping with the context. In addition, the architects have carefully 'read' the adjacent 50 ft. wide rhythm of duplex buildings, and have replicated this in a tightly spaced, regular form which appears like a pair of side-by-side duplex houses on 50 feet wide lots. In reality, the westerly yellow 'house' contains five units and the easterly green building has ten units. One building faces directly onto 10th Avenue. The other building takes up the corner and then extends northwards up Vine Street. The two new buildings are sited as close to the street edges of the lot as practical, to maximize open space to the rear and side. By staggering the front yard setbacks along 10th Avenue from only 15 feet for the corner building to 20 feet for the other building, the siting of the new buildings blends with the 25 foot setback of the neighbouring house to the immediate west. The front yard setback along Vine Street is only five feet, thus maximizing the amount of space available to the rear of the site for common and private space between buildings and units, and the space between the two new buildings.







Vine Street 10 unit building



10th Avenue houses



Another key urban design move to complement the neighbourhood scale and texture was to accommodate the required third floor within the form of a steeply sloping, finely scaled roof form. This serves to minimize the apparent bulk of the buildings, and adds to the single-family aesthetic. The buildings thus read as 'two storeys plus a roof', rather than three full floors. The height of the roof pitch has been carefully set only slightly higher than the adjacent existing duplex. The sloping roof further helps to minimize shadowing and privacy invasion of the adjacent house. The design cleverly plays with strong, sawtooth roof forms, offset by pop-out elements such as dormers and bays, all of which help to maintain a finer scale and sense of individual identity of units. Different colours also further differentiate the two buildings, thus breaking down the potential uniformity of the project.

The units are typically arranged as two-storey units over one-storey units at grade. Each unit has direct front door access from the street, further enhancing the sense of individual identity and privacy. This also contributes to the maximum number of 'eyes on the street', a well proven arrangement for neighbourhood security.

By carefully siting the new project, breaking it down into two buildings, incorporating enough density to render underground parking economical, and skillfully manipulating architectural forms such as roof, bay and window, the project demonstrates that higher density housing can be successfully integrated into lower density neighbourhoods while still protecting cherished single-family characteristics.

# Vancouver's Urban Design

## A Decade of Achievements



Vancouver's evolving Downtown Peninsula: The north shore of False Creek (former Expo site) is transforming from previous industrial to parks and high density residential neighbourhoods.

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